

Price of a barrel of petroleum today:

US\$ 43.26

INSIDE TODAY

U.S. NEWS

WINTER WONDERLAND



John Notebaart is coated in snow and ice while snow blowing his driveway, Friday, Dec. 19, in Appleton, Wis. See *INTERNATIONAL NEWS*

SPORTS NEWS

PAPER TIGER



A fan wears a paper bag on his head during the Detroit Lions-New Orleans Saints NFL football game in Detroit, Sunday, Dec. 21, 2008. See *Sports Today*

Staff of Louis Vuitton

Texas de Brazil hosts Christmas Fiesta



PALM BEACH – The staff of Louis Brazil Churrascaria. Amidst the beautiful salads and meats served by the army of waiters and carvers. *Continued on P. 2*

Aruban Task Team Helps launch the Radisson Resort, Marina & Spa



Anse Marcel – A Task Team of resort professionals went to St Martin to help open an excitingly new Caribbean resort .

Read Page 3

Premium Chicken Line

Crispy or Grilled



i'm lovin' it

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CHICKEN CLASSIC

CHICKEN HONEYMUSTARD



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Staff of Louis Vuitton

Texas de Brazil hosts Christmas Fiesta



Continued from Front Page
The staff of Texas de Brazil made sure everyone had a great time. The staff of Louis Vuitton wish everyone a merry Christmas and a happy new year! ☐



- Photos by JJ -

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In San Martin

Aruban Task Team Helps launch the Radisson Resort, Marina & Spa



Anse Marcel – A Task Team of resort professionals from the Radisson Aruba Resort Casino & Spa, went to St Martin to picturesque Anse Marcel on the French side to help open an excitingly

new, exquisitely French and exotically Caribbean resort of 189 guest-rooms and 63 suites, under the leadership of veteran hotelier, General Manager Jeffrey A. Lesker, who over the past decade also managed

the Wyndham in Aruba and the Radisson Aruba Resort. Jeff called on his former colleagues to come and apply their best practices in St Martin and was rewarded by their excellent assistance.

Eighteen managers and supervisors from the Radisson's Aruban flagship property performed their labor with love, says Jeff, and brought passion and pre-opening expertise to San Martin. For over three weeks in December they infused Aruba's spirit of hospitality into the new resort which was ready to receive its first guests on December 16th for a preview weekend.

They all report working hard, and enjoying the experience as the 18-acre beauty revealed itself offering gourmet food, lush gardens, upscale rooms and public areas, as well as a guest enrichment program.



Pictured here the Aruba specialists in St Martin, with their French Antillean peers, among them Maikel Ras, Director of IT, Charlene Nectar, Asst. Director of Human Resources, Oscar Borja, Director of Engineering, Bruce Cavan Director of Spa, Rosita Meurs,

Asst. Front Office Manager, Rodrick Croes, Maintenance Coordinator, Jeremy Santanilla, Maintenance, Jeanine Poulard, Housekeeping Floor Supervisor, Rudy Croes, Restaurant Manager, John Giel, Pool & Beach Manager & Matt Boland, Executive Chef. □

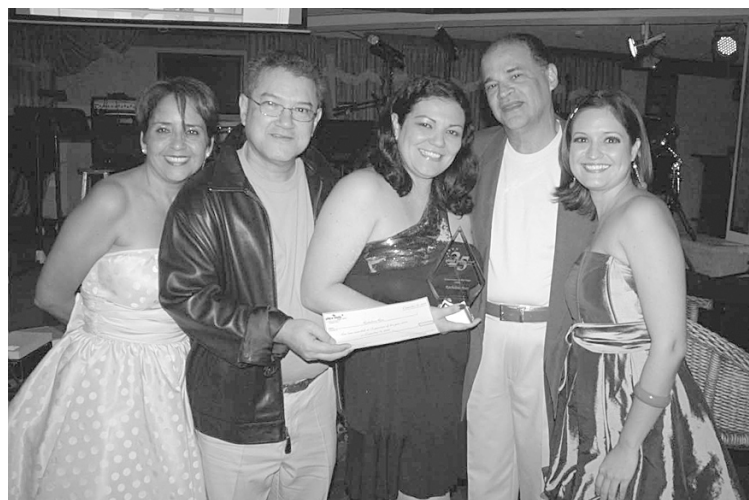


By sharing holiday cheer

Playa Linda rewards its talented crew



ORANJESTAD – Holiday spirit held sway at the Playa Linda Beach Resort with a festive celebration taking place at the neighboring Mr. Jazz. The tight-knit crew of the Playa Linda gathered for dinner, dancing and an awards



ceremony in a celebration of the season as well as shared accomplishments from 2008.

With the resort now undergoing a full renovation, and various improvements and upgrades already accomplished at the resort, it was almost no surprise that Maintenance was named "Department of the Year". Stellar performances were also recorded and rewarded for "Rookie of the Year" Justine Cremony, from Front Office, "Star of the Year" Marlyn Tromp, from Accounting, "Employee of the Year" Maria Estella Morillo from Housekeeping, and "Supervisor of the Year" Rocheline Roos, from Reservations &



Front Office. A special award was also given for "Best Dressed", which went to Janilet Arends from Housekeeping and Santiago Aldea-Nunez from the Grounds department.

Playa Linda General Manager Jan van Nes spoke during the

dinner, expressing appreciation for the entire resort staff, and complementing them on a job well-done during the entire year. Almost without exception, everyone on the Playa Linda staff attended the celebration and shared a spectacular evening together.





WATERFRONT

CRABHOUSE

Monday Special

MONDAY'S CRAB NIGHT

Caesar Salad with fresh Caribbean Shrimp and Mandarin orange slices

The GIANT crab sampler includes Alaskan King Crab Legs, snow crab legs, fried soft shell crab, stuffed crab back, Maryland crab cake, lemon, tartar sauce, and drawn butter

\$ 34.95 + 15% S.C. + 3% Gov. Tax

Served with rice or baked potato, sour cream, Caribbean polenta and garden vegetables, freshly baked corn bread, soft dinner rolls and Dutch butter.

WATERFRONT CRABHOUSE, Renaissance Marketplace

For reservations call: **583-5858 OR 582-0184**

This offer not valid with any other offer or coupon

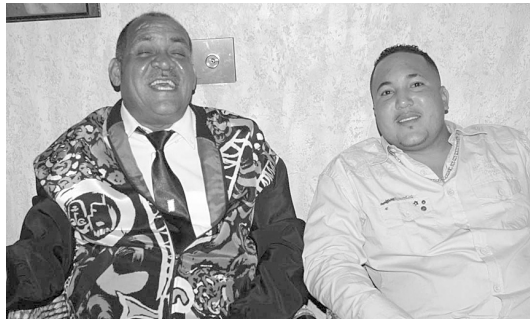
HELP US DECORATE OUR CHRISTMAS TREE

Buy a Kids Meal and receive a X-mas ball, which you can decorate your way. If you bring back your decorated X-mas ball you might win one of the beautiful prizes.

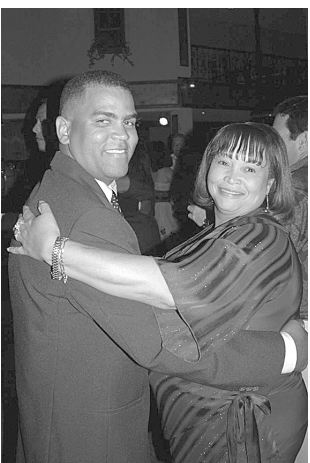


HAVE IT YOUR WAY!

Last day to bring your X-mas ball is on January 9, 2009



The Playa Linda would like to thank Jairo and Rebecca, from Mr. Jazz, and their staff who were very attentive and wonderful during the whole evening. And last but not least, Amado, for the wonderful souvenir photos that each employee received at the end of the evening. ☐



"Buccaneer Restaurant is proud to announce Christmas Eve Buffet"

Enjoy a holiday feast with loved ones on December 24, 2008

Peace



Joy



Appetizers
Gourmet Hors d'oeuvres Cracker
Oysters
Assorted Cheese Tray
Shrimp cocktail
Salad Bar
Buccaneer salad
Potato salad
Poleslaw
Marinated vegetables
Seafood Tempura
Steamed vegetables

Entrees

Honey glazed ham
Spinach stuffed Pork loin
Tenderloin with mushroom caps
Franklin's seafood surprise
Fish Fillet with creole sauce
Shrimps alla Angela
Carving station with Chicago Round
Rice Pilaf
Mostaccioli in Italian sauce & Meatballs

Desserts

Petite Fours, assorted cakes,
mini pastries, assorted fruit,

Dinner is served with a glass of wine or softdrink

Live music with Gaita \$ 32.00 p/p

5:00-11:00pm

Children 1/2 price

Reservations are required, - Spaces are limited

Please call 5866172 or email info@buccaneeraruba.com

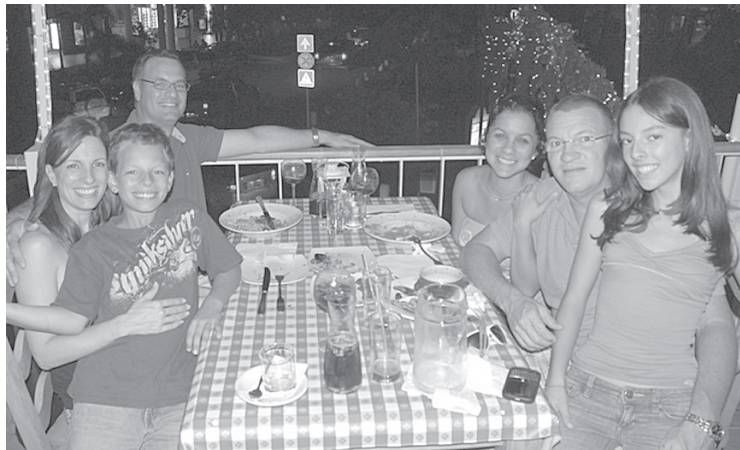


Love



Cheers

Live Musica & Flamico Dancing at Casa Tua



ORANJESTAD - Every weekend, Casa Tua draws a crowd of local and not-so-local folks who can't seem to get enough of the good life and great entertainment. Besides honing the reputation of having the best pizza and place on the island, Casa Tua hosts some of the best social gatherings on the island. There's almost always a wait here, even if you have reservations, so place yourself at the bar with the smell of brick oven pizzas wafting to other tables, and knowing that at some point, that bliss will be yours. Al fresco dining is designed with a chic rustic feel. The atmosphere is cool and relaxed, "Casa Tua" meaning "Your Home" in Italian.

This past Friday night, guest enjoyed the famous Paella night with Flamico Dancers, that continues into Saturday night with live music and more and more Spanish dancing. □

~ Photos by JJ ~

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★★★★★ (Amazon.com) "An Island Away is a no-holds-barred look at Aruba. A must read." — ARTHUR D. JENSEN, LAGO-COLONY.COM

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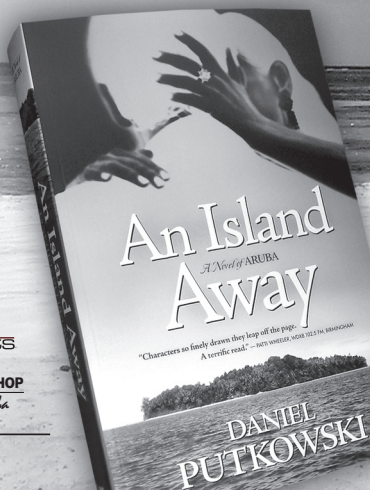
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The French Steakhouse Gets a Seasonal Refresh



Eagle Beach – Locals and visitors have been looking forward to the seasonal menu tweak and recharge of the French Steakhouse, under the expert direction of executive chef George Hoek.

The good news reached us just recently. The master has finally revealed his grand retouch, resulting in a packed dining-room every night of the week. Among appetizers Chef George now lists his popular classics, Escargot a la Pernod and Prosciutto Ham & Melon next to his novel selections, Authentic Aruba Keeshi Yena and Tropical Crab Cakes with pineapple and mango salsa. The classic menu of the French Steak House received a pepped-up twist, also evident in the salad

section featuring a Honey Glazed Salmon Salad and a Hearts of Palm with Roasted Pepper salad. The menu now boasts more seafood, from fresh fish to the totally sinful and amazingly decadent Caribbean Stuffed Shrimp with Crabmeat and Bacon, which became an instant hit. The tequila and sweet chili glaze, lends the Jumbo shrimp a pure taste of heaven! The famous South American Churrasco steak, a signature preparation, now shares the limelight with juicy USDA beef specialties such as NY Sirloin and Filet Mignon. And Chef George definitely took the boring out of

chicken with his Jerk Curried Skewers and Lemon Herb Broilers. Open 7 days a week from 5:30 p.m. - 11:00 p.m. the French Steakhouse is blessed with the nicest staff and a delightfully renovated dining room with sparkling China, crisp linen, an interesting bread basket, colossal desserts and live jazz on piano with Eddy Samson. Hungry patrons will appreciate the Ambassador's 5-course menu featuring the run of the menu highlights for just \$34.95 per person. At the Manchebo Beach Resort & Spa, on Eagle beach. □

Pega Pega Café & Beach Bar perfects beach cuisine



Eagle Beach – Pega Pega Café & Beach Bar at the Manchebo Beach Resort & Spa recently unveiled its new lunch & cocktail menu, conceived and presented by executive chef George Hoek.

A few months ago, when Chef Hoek joined the Manchebo's culinary team, he promised to introduce a "Sun Splashed" menu to the resort's Café & Beach Bar, thus elevating beach cuisine to an ultimate high.

True to his promise, the chef delivered a contemporary menu, listing many favorite dishes from around the world, deriving inspiration off US, Mexican, Thai, Jamaican, Cuban, Greek and Mediterranean menus, all served with a tropical, Caribbean flair.

For starters to Sun-Sational Salads, to open face sandwiches, Cuban pressed jawbreakers and wraps, Chef Hoek went out of his way to bring novelty to mid-day platters, while not forgetting



the classics, which also make an appearance on his menu starring oversize Beef Burgers, Philly Cheese Steak Sandwiches and Hot Dogs. The Pega Pega tropical & frozen cocktail list, with fresh fruit or ice cream smoothies, daiquiris, coladas and margaritas, leaves nothing out, including Yellow Birds, Sex

on the Beach and Mudslides, making a lunch-time brain-freeze, extremely easy to get! The Pega Pega, one of Aruba oldest beach bars is open on fabulous Eagle Beach, with unrivaled views, caring, gracious service, and relaxed atmosphere, from 12 noon to 5 p.m. The bar opens at 11 a.m. to 11 p.m. □



Giorgio's Ristorante Italiano delivers authentic Italian flavors



Eagle Beach -- Italian food lovers needn't walk far. Giorgio's Ristorante Italiano located within walking distance of all low-rise resorts, at the charming Manchebo Beach Resort & Spa, delivers Mamma Mia cuisine.

The Manchebo's Executive Chef George Hoek concocted an irresistible menu of Italian classic specialties with a contemporary feel, served al fresco, on the garden terrace or around the tropical pool. From Anti Pasti to Insalata, Zuppa to Pesce, the menu welcomes diners with familiar recipes, which distinctly demonstrates the talents of Executive Chef George Hoek, a master of flavorful sauces, delicious combinations and delightful presentations

At the heart of the menu, the Pasta section, delivers a nice variety to be shared by two or enjoyed unabashedly solo – go ahead, you only live once.

Pizza appears on Giorgio's menu for those craving thin crusts and ample toppings, with a selection of classic

pies made to order and served with a genuine Italian accent. Angelo, the Maitre D is Italian, naturally.

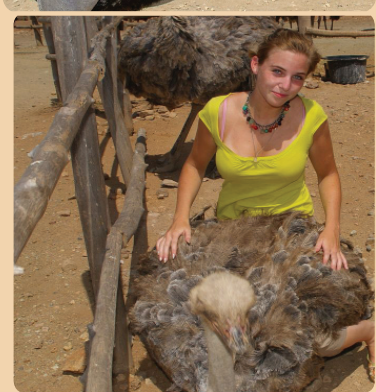
Giorgio's Piatti Principali feature a hit-parade of dishes, which make it very difficult to choose. Giorgio's Osso Bucco will have you moaning with great satisfaction as you heap the braised veal shanks flavored with herbs and a red wine reduction, escorted by potato gnocchi, onto your fork, getting lost in the symphonic, robust flavors. Chef George says General Manager Edgar Roelofs, is an incredibly valuable addition to our team as his food is divine, and his desserts deserve a special article on their own!

To check things out yourselves, call Giorgio's at the Manchebo Beach Resort. It is open for dinner nightly □






Get ready for a close and personal encounter with huge, prehistoric birds! The Aruba Ostrich Farm invites you to meet these unique birds and learn more about their behavior, natural instinct and maybe even stand on its enormous eggs. Our Savanna Lodge Restaurant serves ostrich delicacies, chicken dishes, salads, vegetarian dishes and offers a breathtaking view along Aruba's north shore. Don't forget to pay a visit to our African Art Shop!



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Jolly Pirates welcomes backs more old friends

Repeat Offenders Wanda, Debbie Sparky and Bill

MooMba Beach- Captured aboard the Jolly Pirates was adventure and excitement on the sunny afternoon this foursome returned aboard the Jolly Pirates Teak Schooner. On their Jolly Pirates cruise, it was a newlywed couple and some new found friends along with the crew who got the party started. "Watching young couples dance as the sun sets", Wanda told us, "was a blast"! Wanda, Debbie, Sparky and Bill, Jolly Pirate veterans; join Jolly Pirates sunset sails often. ! Sitting on her mooring beside the Marriott Resort in her Caribbean Playground the 85ft Jolly Pirate with her billowing white sails is a top choice for Aruba's guests seeking a truly extraordinary sailing trip. When we asked the foursome what it is that keeps the foursome returning to the Jolly Pirates Sunset Sail year after year, they told us, "Once you've tried it you'll keep coming back!" Although they rated their Jolly Pirate experience their favorite, the foursome also enjoyed an ATV outing and golfing at Divi Links.

If you want to enjoy a Jolly Pirate experience for yourself, Jolly Pirates Snorkel and Sunset Sail tickets can be purchased at the Jolly Pirates souvenir shop at MooMba Beach located between the Holiday Inn and Marriott Hotels. Use the Aruba Today coupon to enjoy all the entertainment of a Jolly Pirates cruise at an extra value. The entire crew is ready and waiting to welcome you aboard! Tel: 586-8107



Only the highest quality will do Nobushi makes sushi like no one else

PASEO HERENCIA - Nobushi brings to Aruba the finest sushi. If you are in a hurry, go somewhere else. At Nobushi, every single piece gets the love and attention it needs from the professional Sushi chefs. The chefs specialize in Aruba Exotic Sushi and Asian Cuisine with unique flavors second to none. The ever so friendly staff will gladly explain the different dishes and specials to you, and help you with unique food & wine pairings.

Nobushi Sushi Bar & Asian Cuisine features a variety sashimi, sushi rolls, chicken, fish and meat entrees that will enlighten your senses. Nobushi is located in the Paseo Herencia Mall across the Holiday Inn Resort.



For reservations & more information please call: 586-2211 or ask your concierge.

Red Sail Sports Aruba for all sail cruises

Sail with Red Sail Sports Aruba Sunset along Aruba's scenic Coast-line

PALM BEACH - Red Sail Sports' catamaran will take you on an unforgettable journey: the Mexican Dinner Sail. Your trip includes a Live Mariachi Band, Mexican Food and an open bar with Tequila, Coronitas and Margaritas. The Mexican Party Sails on Friday from 6:00 pm to 8:00 pm. Aruba's trade winds provide the ideal conditions for sailing aboard Red Sail Sports' top quality, luxurious catamarans.



Set sail and join Red Sail Sports Half Day Luncheon Snorkel Sail or the romantic Sunset Sail. Red Sail Sports also offers a Dinner Sail which combines a sail along Aruba's scenic coastline and a spectacular view of the sunset with a tantalizing buffet catered by award-winning chefs. If you want to discover Aruba's underwater world, be sure to get in touch with Red Sail Sports. Learn to dive in one day with the Discover Scuba Dive Course, get PADI certified or join us on our daily one and two tank dives. Red Sail Sports is Aruba's lead-in dive and water-sports operator. Activity desks are located at the Hyatt Regency, Marriott Resorts and on Renaissance Island.



To make reservations call 586-1603 or go to www.redsail-aruba.com. Be sure to visit one of Red Sail Sports' stores for the latest in swimwear, beach essentials, T-shirts and souvenirs.



It's time again Christmas lunch at Matilde

DOWNTOWN - Matilde will host the perfect Christmas lunch or dinner with family, friends or colleagues! Our restaurant gives you the surrounding you want to celebrate Christmas in style.

We also serve our regular a la carte menu during the holidays. We invite you to have a look at our mouth watering menus, and give us a call to make your reservation.

Our Executive Chef Linda has created various exceptional menus specifically for this year's Christmas Celebrations. We have menus for lunch or dinner, which will let up to hundred persons rejoice in the splendor only on offer at Matilde.

Please feel free to contact us with any questions you may have, we will gladly assist you in making your holidays an unforgettable celebration!



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"Aruhiba" Aruba's homemade cigar

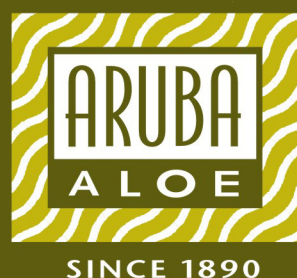


ORANJESTAD - Benjamin Petrochi has started the newest export product of Aruba, locally produced cigars called 'Aruhiba'. These cigars are produced and cultivated in Aruba. Petrochi has always had an interest in the cigar business and has also sold cigars from outside, and now he is growing his own tobacco crop. After many attempts and trips to Santo Domingo and Cuba he started his own production and cultivation of



"Aruhiba" cigars in Aruba. The process took 5 years Petrochi's dedication to the cigars is important for the molding and process of making a perfect cigar which takes a long time. The cigar case is specially designed for the cigars with the logo 'Aruhiba' and 'Made in Aruba'. Petrochi considers 'Aruhiba' a promotion for Aruba through fine quality cigars. The company sells international cigars as well. Buy a gift box of Aruhiba

Corona with five cigars and get 1 free for \$35.00. Located at the Historic Dutch Windmill from 8am to 8pm. Closed on Sunday. The only place to get Aruhiba and all major credit cards accepted. We have homemade and best premium Cuban Cigars. All cigars are legal through costum. Call 586-7833 or 593-6177. Open for tour operators and we have a large parking space. Come and see Mr. Petrochi rolling the cigars everyday.



Visit Aruba's world famous ALOE FACTORY & MUSEUM

THIS MONTH: REDUCED ENTRANCE FEE & FREE GIFT



When you pass by the Aruba Aloe fields and its modern factory at Hato, it's hard to imagine that the same fields were already in use 160 years ago.

Where nowadays a modern factory shines and produces a large collection of cosmetic products that are being exported all over the world, in 1890 farmers carefully planted the first Aloe Vera plants. Until today Aruba Aloe Balm NV has continued to cultivate the wonder plant and the dedicated field workers are working hard every day to keep the plants in excellent condition.

It's not a surprise that the Aloe from Aruba is called 'the World's Finest Aloe™'. Each Aruba Aloe cosmetic product contains **100% pure Aruba Aloe Vera gel**, which is freshly harvested and processed to give all products a unique moisturizing effect.

This month, Aruba Aloe Balm NV introduces a special **Reduced Fee of USD \$3,-** for the Aruba Aloe Museum and Factory tour, which gives

you an inside look into the production process of the Aruba Aloe products and you will learn all about the 160-year old history of Aloe on Aruba. All visitors who pay the entrance fee, will receive a **coupon of USD \$3.-** which they can use towards a purchase of any of the Aruba Aloe products in the Aruba Aloe store at the factory. A good reason to visit the Aruba Aloe Museum and Factory this week and bring home one of the few products that are truly made on Aruba.

ARUBA ALOE TOUR INFORMATION

Tour Hours

Monday to Friday: 8:30 AM – 4:00 PM

Saturdays: 9:00 AM – 12:00 noon

Tours start every 20 minutes, no reservation needed

Location

We are located at a short drive from the Hotel area at Pitastraat 115, Hato
For more information call 588-3222

* The coupon has no cash value and can only be used for the purchase of Aruba Aloe products on the day of the tour and only at the store located at the factory in Hato.

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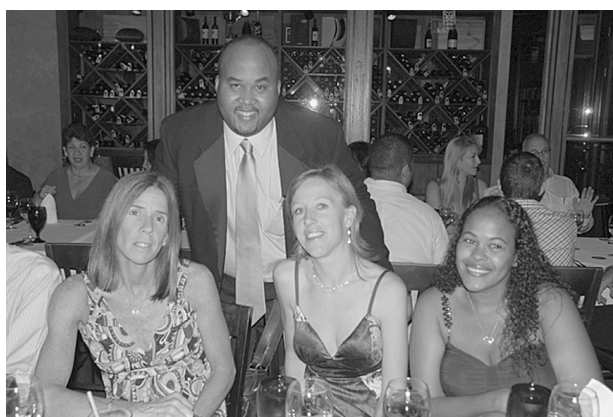
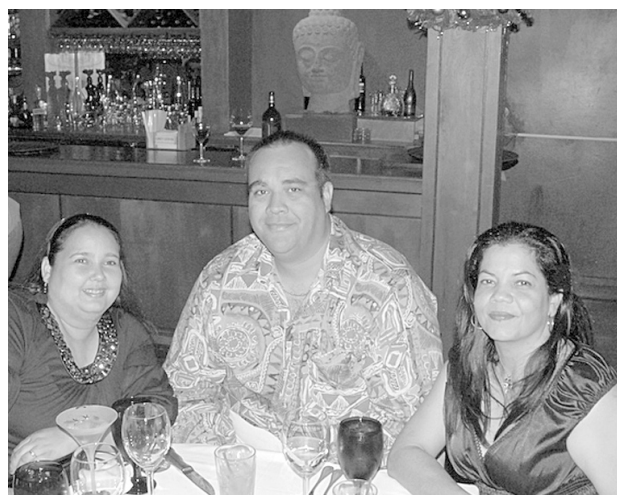


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Local businesses choose Texas de Brazil

Aruba Aloe team go to Brazil for dinner



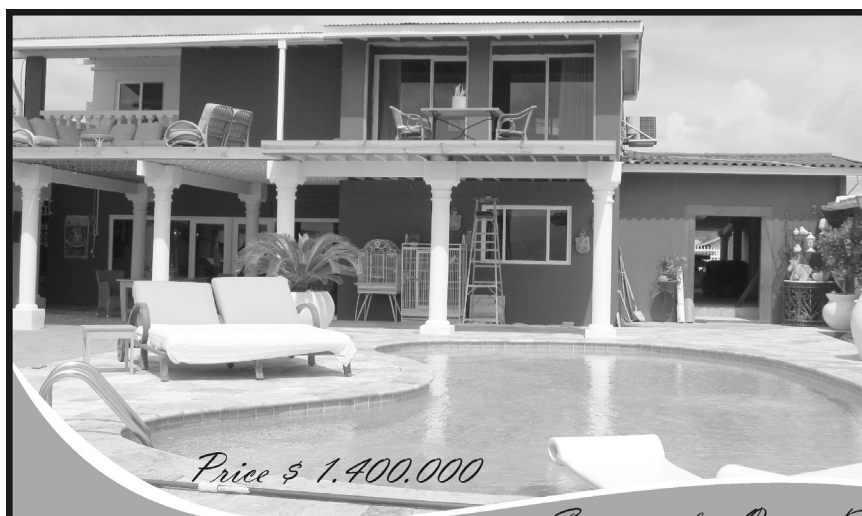
PALM BEACH – The management and staff of Aruba Aloe celebrated their Christmas dinner celebration at Texas de

Buccaneer RESTAURANT

Buccaneer Restaurant is an island tradition for over 25 years that serve creative dishes prepared with a European touch with irresistible secret flavorings which continue to lure guests back, again and again. *Feast on fresh Caribbean catch in one of the cozy booths with a view of an aquarium at each seat, surrounded by tropical splendor and nautical decor. Our second dining room resembles an underwater cave, complete with a 7,500 gallon saltwater aquarium, unseen elsewhere.* Our friendly staff is here to give you the "Welcome Aboard" feeling and the chef-owner will personally take care of you.

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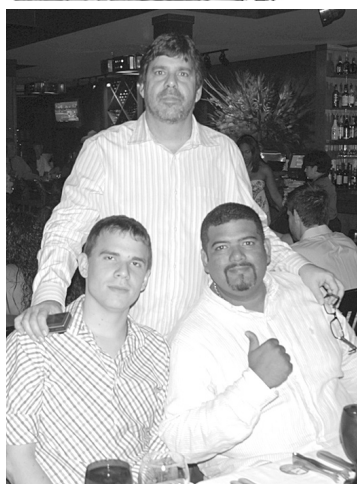
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Brazil Churrascaria this past Saturday night. The Aruba Aloe team traded in a taste of their world famous island



including appetizers, soups, salads, sushi rolls and an array of side items. The Aloe team kept their cards on green for a never ending flow of sizzling Angus Beef, lamb, pork, chicken and Brazilian sausage accompanied by an excitement of sauces and sweet fried bananas as the cherry on top. This was more than fine dining, it is Texas de Brazil.

Texas de Brazil wishes everyone a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year! ☐

~Photos by JJ~



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Passions entertains



their footwear came off. Passion's kitchen delivered its signature Reef Cuisine, in an incomparable setting, to torch light, as one of Aruba's best singers entertained, prompting one of the young visitors to belt out an excellent version of "Cheeseburgers in Paradise," never missing any of the intricate verses. The staff at Passions catered to

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Specially priced at \$95 per person, the Dinner Sail offers excellent value as it combines a sail along Aruba's scenic coastline and a spectacular view of the sunset with a tantalizing buffet catered by award-winning chefs.

Dinner includes appetizers, salads, main courses and dessert selections. Champagne, red and white wine and beer is served along with an open bar which offers a variety of tropical cocktails, including some Aruban specialties – be sure to ask for a Captain's Special!

Wednesday's nights Dinner Sail features a traditional Caribbean themed buffet catered by the chefs from the Marriott Resort. Thursday's night Dinner Sail features a

buffet with a Mediterranean twist. Whichever night you choose, you're sure to enjoy a unique dinner experience.

Aruba's trade winds provide the ideal conditions for sailing aboard Red Sail Sports' top quality, luxurious catamarans. Set sail and join Red Sail Sports fun filled Half Day Luncheon or Antilla Snorkel Sail. These trips are safe for kids of all ages and bring you to the best snorkeling spots in Aruba, including Aruba's most famous snorkeling spot – the wreck of the Antilla where you can see yellowtail snapper, angelfish and dozens of other tropical fish.

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Aruban sunset – truly the best way to watch the sun go down while on your Caribbean holiday.

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caria fits into just about every dieter's menu plan.

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umpteen cuts of sizzling beef, pork, lamb, sausage, and poultry. The meats are prepared in the healthiest style of cooking—slow roasting—where much of the fat drips off in the roasting process, so those looking for a lower fat option to sautéing, pan frying, or deep frying will also be able to indulge.

The Brazilian-style steakhouse also offers up a garden full of healthy eats on a **lavish 40-item seasonal salad bar**, giving dieters plenty to choose from to accompany the slow-roasted meats. A selection of fresh lettuces and vegetables may be standard for most salad bars, but Texas de Brazil's version goes a gourmet twist further, treating the palate to additional items like marinated portabella mushrooms, sweet roasted

bell peppers, hearts of palm, sundried tomatoes, imported cheeses—including fresh buffalo mozzarella—sushi, homemade soups, and much more.

The salad bar is included in the continuous service meal with unlimited choices from the grilled meats, but for vegetarians or the non-meat eaters, a special price is offered for just the salad bar.

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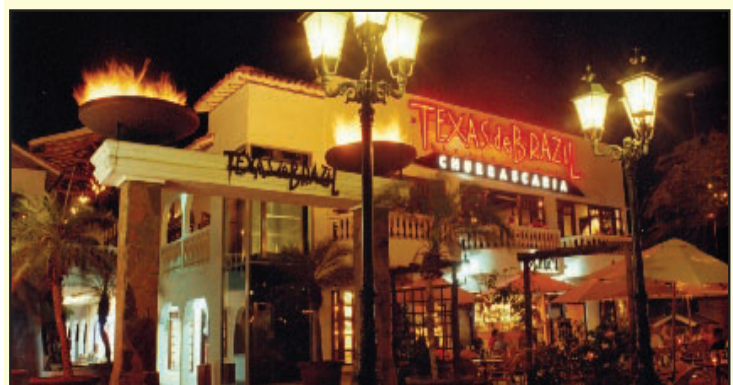
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In this image taken from video released by KUSA-TV in Denver is shown a Continental Airlines Boeing 737 on Sunday, Dec. 21, 2008 in Denver. Thirty-eight people suffered injuries including broken bones, and two were in critical condition with fractures after the plane slid off the runway and caught fire trying to depart Saturday evening from Denver International Airport, according to officials.

Associated Press

Firefighter: 'Miracle' no deaths in burning jet

Read Page B6

Winter's opening day packs a punch to northern states

By AMY LORENTZEN

Associated Press Writer

DES MOINES, Iowa (AP) - Weekend storms in the nation's northern half knocked out power to thousands of customers Sunday and created nightmarish conditions for holiday travelers coast to coast on the first official day of winter. Gusty winds in the Midwest, where wind chills dipped to minus 30 or lower, produced whiteout conditions that contributed to at least two vehicle pileups, in Wisconsin and Michigan.

And blizzard warnings were issued for parts of Maine, where up to 24 inches of snow was expected. Forecasters warned that strong wind could create whiteout conditions and deep drifts. "This is a classic nor'easter," said meteorologist John Cannon. "It's got all the features."

Parts of Iowa and Illinois were under blizzard warnings. Power was knocked out to more than 35,000 customers Sunday in Illinois shortly after being restored to most who had lost it after a storm last week, utilities said.

"There was so much icing down there on the trees and power lines; then the wind is coming through and knocking things down," said ComEd spokeswoman Kim Johnson.

More than 70,000 homes and businesses in Indiana remained in the dark after an ice storm that struck Thursday. Wind gusts topping 30 mph hindered repair work, officials said.

Wind gusts up to 35 mph blew snow and contributed to a crash involving at least 30 vehicles Sunday on a Michigan highway, officials said. At least one person was seriously injured in

the crash, state police said.

At least a dozen vehicles were involved in a pileup Sunday on a Wisconsin highway that briefly shut down southbound lanes. Some people were injured, the sheriff's office said, but it wasn't clear how many.

Temperatures in northern Maine early Sunday included minus 40 on the Big Black River and minus 35 in Allagash. Gov. John Baldacci announced a noon start for state government offices on Monday. The storm battering Maine also produced sleet and freezing rain in New York and New Jersey, delaying flights at Newark Airport by an average of two hours. Some arrivals at Logan International Airport in Boston were delayed by more than three hours.

And as the weather interfered with airports in Northern states, George Bush Intercontinental Airport in Houston had delays on average of about five hours. And while officials in the Pacific Northwest were relieved Sunday that a storm there failed to meet expectations, hundreds of travelers nonetheless lingered at Seattle-Tacoma International Airport, waiting for their next flight. At Seattle's Greyhound bus terminal, dozens were stranded overnight, passengers said. No Greyhound buses were running there Sunday. Interstate 90, Washington state's main east-west route, reopened Sunday across Snoqualmie Pass in the Cascade Range. Washington Emergency Management spokesman Rob Harper said fewer than 5,000 customers lost power, and state officials said county emergency operations were scaling back or closing. □

Top U.S. general in Iraq prepares for troop decision

By CHELSEA J. CARTER

Associated Press Writer

BASRA, Iraq (AP) - The top U.S. general in Iraq said he will make a decision about the future role of American troops about 60 days after January's provincial elections, which would be enough time to address any violence that may arise from the results.

Army Gen. Raymond Odierno told The Associated Press that the two month period after the election will allow U.S. troops and Iraqi security forces to ensure those legitimately elected are able to be seated. He also said U.S. troops will move into southern Iraq early next year to replace departing British forces.

"So we have to make sure in the election those who didn't win understand that, and we will be able to seat the new government



Gen. Ray Odierno, left, commander of multi-national forces Iraq, speaks to the media before meeting with U.S. Defense Secretary Robert Gates Saturday, Dec. 13, 2008, in Balad, Iraq.

Associated Press properly," Odierno, the overall commander of U.S. and allied forces in Iraq, told the AP late Saturday.

Continued on page B10



A giant star on a Macy's store shines as heavy snow falls late at night Saturday, Dec. 20, 2008, in downtown Seattle, which rarely sees such major snow levels. Very few cars were on city streets at night, but there was heavy pedestrian traffic as people took in the sights and sounds of the winter storm.

Associated Press

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Cheney says Congress failed struggling automakers



Vice President Dick Cheney attends the unveiling of President George W. Bush's portrait at the National Portrait Gallery on Friday, Dec. 19, 2008 in Washington.

By **STEPHEN OHLEMACHER**
Associated Press Writer
WASHINGTON (AP) - Vice President Dick Cheney blamed Congress for failing to bail out the auto industry, saying the White House was forced to step

in to save U.S. car companies. In an interview broadcast Sunday, Cheney said the economy is in such bad shape that the car companies might not have survived without the \$17.4 billion in emergency loans that President George W. Bush approved on Friday. "The president decided specifically that he wanted to try to deal with it and not preside over the collapse of the automobile industry just as he goes out of office," Cheney said in an interview broadcast on "Fox News Sunday." Lawmakers "had ample opportunity to deal with this issue and they failed," Cheney said. "The president had no choice but to step in." Congress rejected an auto bailout package after many Republicans and some Democrats opposed it. Some said U.S. auto companies would be better off if they were required to reorganize through bankruptcy. Cheney leaves office Jan. 20 as one of the most powerful, if unpopular, vice presidents in recent history. He played

a key role in many of Bush's major policy decisions and, in the interview, was unapologetic in his review of the past eight years. He staunchly defended the Bush administration's use of executive power in the fight against terrorism and disagreed with calls to limit presidential authority. "If you think about what Abraham Lincoln did during the Civil War, what FDR (Franklin D. Roosevelt) did during World War II. They went far beyond anything we've done in a global war on terror," the vice president contended. Cheney said he was unconcerned about polls showing him as unpopular, saying that people who spend too much time reading polls "shouldn't serve in these jobs." He offered a somber assessment of the economic challenges facing the incoming Obama administration, saying there is a growing consensus that government action will be needed next year to help revive the economy. But he declined to judge the economic stimulus plan that Obama is considering because the program has yet to

be announced. Obama and his team are working to come up with details of a plan to pump up the economy with \$850 billion or more in government spending over the next few years. Their goal is to create or save 3 million jobs in the next two years. "I'd want to see what they're going to spend it on," Cheney said. "There usually are fairly significant differences between we Republicans and the Democrats on how you stimulate the economy." Cheney, also speaking about the future of the Republican Party, the hunt for Osama bin Laden, and the role for his successor, Joe Biden, said he: _expects the Republican Party to rebound from this year's election defeats, but is unsure whether Alaska Gov. Sarah Palin will lead the comeback as the party's nominee for president in 2012. "I don't think she has any kind of lock on that," Cheney said of this year's vice presidential candidate. "She'll have to go out and earn it just as anybody else would have to." □

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JOLLY PIRATES Cruises NOW Sailing DAILY!**\$10 coupon on back page. Tickets available in our Pirate Souvenir Shop at MooMba Beach. Call 586 8107****Medicaid applicants grow as recession widens****By KEVIN FREKING****Associated Press Writer**

WASHINGTON (AP) - That day in July was one that Tammy Morse won't soon forget.

Five months earlier, her husband lost his job as a recruiter for the financial services industry. Now it was the summer and the family savings were gone. She saw no way to get health insurance coverage for her family other than to apply for Medicaid, the government-funded health insurance program for the poor.

And that was why she made the drive from her Stratford, Connecticut, home to the nearest office of the state's Department of Social Services. "It was humbling," said the mother of two. "It's funny how your attitude changes, because honestly, I was probably a little judgmental previously. ... For lack of a better way to put it, that was for other people. It wasn't for me."

Around the country, similar stories are playing out for thousands of families.

Since the recession began a year ago, many states have seen increases in the Medicaid rolls just as tax revenues are falling below projections. Governors have lobbied President-elect Barack Obama and Congress to help them weather the downturn by increasing the federal government's share of Medicaid spending for at least two years.

The governors said the extra \$40 billion would ease the service cuts or tax increases that legislatures need to balance state budgets.

The unemployment rate has jumped from about 4.7 percent last December, when the recession began, to 6.7 percent today. Economists estimated in a Kaiser Family Foundation report that each 1 percent gain in the unemployment rate adds 1 million people to the Medicaid and State Children's Health Insurance Program.

In Connecticut, a state faring better than many, enrollment in the Medicaid program, called HUSKY (Healthcare for Uninsured Kids and Youth), has climbed from about 312,000 last December to about 329,500 in November - a 6 percent

increase. Many who lost their jobs were eligible to continue group health insurance. But that is not an option in most cases because they no longer have an employer picking up a large share of their premiums. Cassandra Edmonds, a single parent who joined HUSKY in October, is a newcomer to the program like Morse. Her job as a parent-activities coordinator with the Bridgeport school district was eliminated to save money. She has found a job selling life insurance, but her earnings are low enough that she is eligible for HUSKY coverage.

The insurance is particularly important for her 4-year-old son, who has glaucoma and tubes in his ears to prevent repeated infections. He has to check in with a specialist about every three months for each condition. Edmonds said she never imagined she would be relying on government safety nets to make that happen.

"I never really thought I would

be without a job," Edmonds said. "I have an MBA. I'm not trying to sound cocky or anything."

Donny Djurkovic does not have a master's in business administration degree, but he did have decades of work experience when he lost his job with a small food company. Djurkovic, like Morse and Edmonds, is from the Bridgeport area.

He said he was able to continue health insurance for himself, but insuring his son would have increased his premium to more than \$1,200 a month. So his son, 6, went without insurance for a few months, leading to much worry.

"I put his bicycle in the shed. I didn't want anything to happen, to be honest with you," Djurkovic said.

He learned about HUSKY from a pharmacy clerk and took her advice to apply. Despite the relief, he admits to some feelings of guilt about accepting the government's assistance.



Cassandra Edmonds and her four-year-old son Quinn pose for a photographer at their home in Bridgeport, Conn. Sunday Dec. 7 2008. Cassandra Edmonds is a single parent, and was laid off by the Board of Education when they had to cut positions because of funding. Around the country, enrollment in Medicaid is soaring due to the economy and states are asking for billions of dollars in relief from the federal government.

Associated Press

"In all these years, I never had put my hand out and I was so proud of myself and everything. But there is unfortunately times when you do need it," he said. "And I still feel bad. Would you believe this? When I see my unemployment insurance, I say this is not me. I'm not used

to it." The United States is the only wealthy, industrialized country that does not have a universal health care insurance system, although there are government-funded health care programs for the elderly, disabled, military families and veterans, and the poor. □

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Barack Obama set to release Blagojevich report this week

This Dec. 19, 2008 file photo shows Illinois Gov. Rod Blagojevich at the State of Illinois Building in Chicago. Blagojevich, facing a federal corruption complaint, says he is not guilty of any criminal wrongdoing and plans to stay on the job. Gov. Rod Blagojevich is legendary in Illinois political circles for not picking up the phone or returning calls, even from important figures like the state's senior senator, Dick Durbin. But there was always one call Blagojevich regularly took, say his aides, and that was from Rahm Emanuel — his congressman, his one-time campaign adviser and, more recently — and troubling for Emanuel — one of his contacts with President-elect Barack Obama's transition staff.

Associated Press

HONOLULU (AP) - President-elect Barack Obama will offer details early this week about his transition staff's contact with Illinois Gov. Rod Blagojevich, who is facing federal charges of plotting to swap appointment of Obama's Senate successor for cash or a job.

A Democratic official said

Sunday an internal report Obama ordered would be released no later than Tuesday. The official, who requested anonymity because the report is not yet public, said transition aides were eager to make public their findings about discussions with Blagojevich's office and move past the distraction that the governor's scandal had become.

The report's release is not expected to interrupt the Obama family's 12-day long vacation that began Saturday in his native Hawaii.

Aides say Obama has no plans to make a public statement on his internal report, which he has withheld from release at the request of federal prosecutors who are interviewing witnesses in the Illinois public corruption case.

The Obama family is staying in a \$9 million single-story oceanfront home in a pricey but laid-back neighborhood over the mountain from downtown Honolulu where the president-elect grew up.

The five-bedroom wood frame house sits on almost an acre of land, a favorite spot for wind surfers, kayakers and dog

walkers.

The white sand in front of the house is public land, just like all beaches under state law. The Obamas may see neighbors out for a walk or jog.

Aides said that Obama has no formal events planned during the trip but he will continue to have business meetings and intelligence briefings.

On Sunday, the Obama transition team announced Vice President-elect Joe Biden will oversee the new administration's effort to find ways of building up the ranks of the middle class.

The task force will include four Cabinet members as well as other presidential advisers, the transition team said.

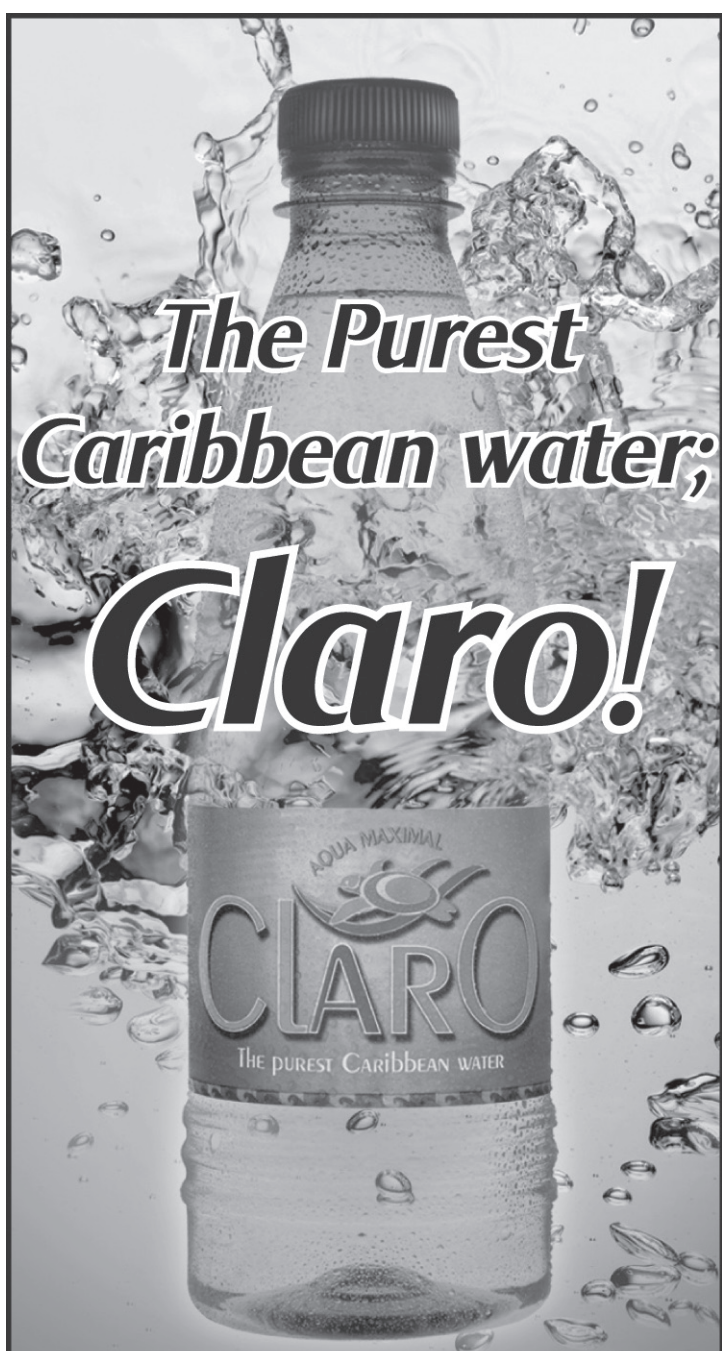
The goal is to recommend proposals to ensure the middle class is "no longer being left behind," Biden said. The proposals could include executive orders and legislative plans.

"Our charge is to look at existing and future policies across the board and use a yard stick to measure how they are impacting the working and middle-class families," Biden said in a statement released Sunday. "Is the number of these families growing? Are they prospering? President-elect Obama and I know the economic health of working families has eroded, and we intend to turn that around."

Obama has spent recent weeks at a breakneck pace, barreling through appointments. During the last week, Obama met reporters every day to announce his picks for Cabinet posts, rounding out the bulk of his top economic, national security and domestic policy officials in his administration-in-waiting. Still unfilled are his picks for CIA director and national intelligence director, along with other sub-Cabinet appointments. Aides say the president-elect would continue working on those during his vacation.

On Saturday, Obama said he would seek to create or save 3 million jobs in the next two years instead of the 2.5 million he proposed last month.

Obama set the more ambitious target earlier this week after meeting with top economic advisers who cautioned the nation's unemployment rate could exceed 9 percent given the current pace of job losses, transition officials said. □



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Fort Dix jurors say they expect to finish Monday

CAMDEN, New Jersey (AP) - Jurors in the case of five men accused of plotting an attack on New Jersey's Fort Dix say they expect to finish deliberating Monday.

The panel returned to work Sunday morning.

In their first 30 hours of deliberations, the jurors had asked to see two transcripts of testimony.

The five defendants are foreign-born Muslim men from the former Yugoslavia, Jordan and Turkey who lived for years in the Philadelphia suburb of Cherry Hill.

They're charged with conspiring to kill military personnel and attempted murder and would face life in prison if they've convicted on those charges.

None of the men testified in their trial but their lawyers say they were not plotting anything. □

Magnitude-4.1 quake shakes central California

HOLLISTER, California (AP) - Geologists say central California has been shaken by an earthquake measuring magnitude-4.1, strong enough to be noticed but without producing any reports of damage or injuries.

The U.S. Geological Survey said the Sunday morning temblor was centered eight miles south of the unincorporated town of Tres Pinos, about 97 miles south of San Francisco.

It was focused at about four miles beneath the surface.

A dispatcher for the San Benito County sheriff's office said the quake was felt, but no one complained of any damage or injuries. □

Chicago sheriff baits fugitives with holiday ruse

CHICAGO - The sheriff's office in Chicago has arrested more than 60 fugitives with a net of holiday cheer. Cook County Sheriff Tom Dart said Sunday that the suspects were invited to take a retailers' survey for holiday shoppers at a hotel earlier this month.

Participants who brought along a scratch-off card that was included with the survey were promised at least \$500.

Those who showed up were taken into custody. One man who arrived with marijuana in his pocket was charged with possession on top of his previous charges.

The fugitives had warrants for crimes including forgery and aggravated battery. □

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Firefighter: 'Miracle' no deaths in burning jet



Kim Day, aviation manager for the city of Denver, talks about Continental Airlines flight 1404 that skidded off a runway at Denver International Airport on Saturday, Dec. 20, 2008. The plane veered off the runway into a ravine and caught fire Saturday night, forcing passengers to evacuate on emergency slides and injuring nearly 40 people, officials said.

By KRISTEN WYATT
Associated Press Writer

DENVER (AP) - It was a miracle that no one was killed when an airliner veered sharply off a runway during takeoff, burst into flames and nearly broke apart, firefighters said Sunday.

There was no official word on the possible cause of the crash of Continental Flight 1404 at

Denver International Airport, which injured 38 people. Cockpit and voice recorders were recovered and appeared to be in good condition, the National Transportation Safety Board said Sunday.

The entire right side of the Boeing 737-500 was burned in the Saturday evening accident, and melted plastic from overhead compartments dripped

Associated Press

onto the seats. Investigators said the plane's right engine was ripped away along with all the landing gear.

"It was a miracle ... that everybody survived the impact and the fire," said Bill Davis, an assistant Denver fire chief assigned to the airport. "It was just amazing."

A crack encircled much of the fuselage near the trailing edge of the wings, Davis said.

Davis, one of the firefighters who rushed to the scene, said the plane came to a rest about 200 yards from one of the airport's four fire stations. Passengers walked out of the ravine in 24-degree cold and crowded inside the station, he said.

The 110 passengers and five crew members left the plane on emergency slides, officials said.

Passenger Emily Pellegrini

told The Denver Post that as the plane headed down the runway, "It was bumpy, then it was bumpier, then it wasn't bumpy."

Gabriel Trejos told KUSA-TV in Denver that the plane buckled toward its middle and that the seats felt like they were closing in on him, his pregnant wife and his 13-month-old son, who was on his lap. His knees were bruised from the seat in front of him.

Maria Trejos told KUSA that there was an explosion and that the right side of the plane, where they were sitting, became engulfed in flames. The family used an emergency exit and slid down the wing of the jet to the ground.

The injuries included broken bones, but Robert Sumwalt, an NTSB member, didn't know whether they were caused by the impact or the evacuation. Two people were initially listed in critical condition at the University of Colorado Hospital in Denver but were upgraded Sunday, one to serious and one to fair, spokeswoman Tonya Ewers said.

Continental Airlines spokeswoman Julie King said fewer than seven people were still in the hospital Sunday morning.

The plane veered off course about 2,000 feet from the end of the runway and did not appear to have gotten airborne, city aviation manager Kim Day said.

Investigators said Sunday evening that work would start again at daybreak. Robert Sumwalt, an NTSB member, said the damaged plane would remain for several days in the 40-foot deep ravine where it landed. That runway will remain closed during the investigation, he said.

The weather was cold but not snowy when the plane took off on a flight to Houston around 6:20 p.m. Saturday.

The ravine in which the plane came to rest sits between runways. Flat land is rare on the plains abutting the Rocky Mountains near Denver, and the airport was built on gently rolling country. The runways are elevated so rain and snow will drain away. □

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9 decapitated bodies found in southern Mexico

By NATALIA PARRA

Associated Press Writer

ACAPULCO, Mexico (AP) - Authorities found the decapitated bodies of nine men in the southern state of Guerrero on Sunday, and some of the victims have been identified as soldiers.

State Public Safety Secretary Juan Salinas Altes said the bodies were found on a major boulevard in the state capital, Chilpancingo, just a few hundred yards from where the state governor was scheduled to participate in a traditional religious procession later in the day.

Salinas Altes said experts are still trying to identify the bodies, but he said a still-undetermined number of them are soldiers. An army base is located nearby.

Mexico has been hit by a rising wave of drug-fueled violence, and officials estimate that more than 5,300 people have died in organized-crime-related slayings so far in 2008.

Mexican drug cartels have increasingly taken to chopping the heads off their victims, who include rival traffickers or

lawmen. On Aug. 28, a dozen decapitated bodies were found outside Merida, the capital of Yucatan state.

Two other severed heads were found on the same boulevard in Chilpancingo on Dec. 7 alongside a sign reading: "Soldiers who are supposedly

fighting crime, and they turn out to be kidnappers. This is going to happen to you."

Scores of police and soldiers have been killed since President Felipe Calderon launched an offensive against the cartels in late 2006. While Mexican criminal gangs

once appeared to steer clear of confrontations with the army, they now often openly attacking soldiers.

In May 2007, gunmen linked to a drug gang killed five soldiers in an ambush in the neighboring state of Michoacan.

Also Sunday, federal police reported they had captured three suspected cartel hit men in the border city of Tijuana. The suspects allegedly had six assault rifles and about 3,500 rounds of ammunition at the home where they were caught.

Chavez says plot to kill Bolivian leader uncovered

CARACAS, Venezuela — Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez says a plot to assassinate his friend and ally Evo Morales of Bolivia has been uncovered.

Chavez says the Bolivian president called and told him that authorities in the Andean country had "discovered an assassination plot."

The Venezuelan leader said during a radio broadcast on Sunday that he wouldn't go into details — leaving that to Bolivian officials.

Morales is one of several close leftist allies in Latin America who share the Venezuelan leader's antagonistic stance toward the United States.

Chavez says he told Morales to "be careful."

Morales has faced persistent protests by opponents but won a recall referendum to reaffirm his mandate in August. □



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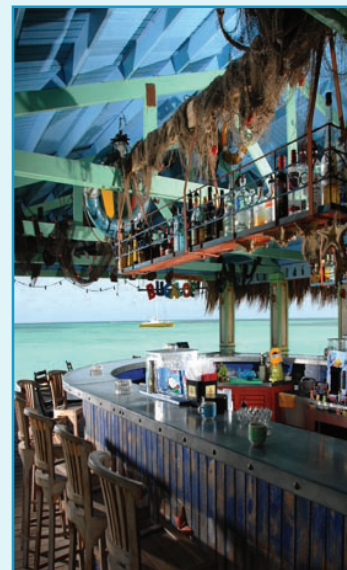
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happy times can be viewed at www.bugaloe.com. Don't forget to put your own movie of you and your friends having a whale of a time at Bugaloe on the web and enjoy being famous, crazy and hilarious. So upload, upload! We are looking forward to seeing you on YouTube or live in action.




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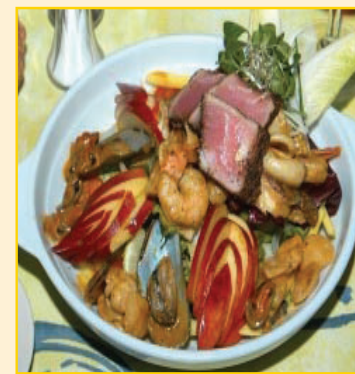
consider yourself addicted. The owners Jeroen Kuling and Hans Heijink together with the

ryone to enjoy. The ambiance at the restaurant is out of this world, whether dinning inside in the relaxed air-conditioned dinning room or outside on the terrace to enjoy the tropical breeze and daily live music.

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U.S. troops walk during a reopening of the Mutanabi Street in Baghdad, Iraq, Thursday, Dec. 18, 2008. The Mutanabi Street, also known as Baghdad's Book Market, was largely destroyed in several large bombings in the past years.

Associated Press

U.S. TROOP

Continued from Page B1

"And once we get to that point, it's now time for us to take a look at what is right for the future."

Military officials say Odierno has already outlined for Pentagon leaders a withdrawal plan that would pull thousands of troops out of Iraq early next year but move more cautiously than the 16-month timetable pledged by U.S. President-elect Barack Obama.

"I expect we will start to thin our forces in '09. It's the right time to do that," he said. "We will do it in a deliberate, careful way to make sure we have enough combat power to support the Iraqis in case there is the unexpected, a resurgence

of an extremist group of some sort that tries to have an effect of the stability inside Iraq."

Odierno said he has not talked with anyone on Obama's transition team.

"I have a mission I currently have with the current commander in chief, and I am working toward that mission," Odierno said. "When our new commander in chief comes in and tells us what he would like us to do, then I will migrate my mission and my plan to what he wants to do. Until then there is not much to talk about."

News of America's southern deployment came as Iraq's major Parliament party leaders reached a compromise Sunday that would allow all other

foreign troops in Iraq to remain until the end of July 2009. A U.N. mandate authorizing military operations in Iraq expires Dec. 31 and those troops would have no legal ground to remain otherwise. Parliament will vote on the draft resolution Monday, said Abbas al-Bayati of the Shiite United Iraqi Alliance. Britain has already announced it plans to withdraw its 4,000 troops from southern Iraq by the end of May, and Odierno told the AP that U.S. troops would replace British forces in the region early next year. Odierno said he is considering moving either a brigade or division headquarters _ about 100 personnel - as well as an undetermined number of combat troops to Iraq's second-largest city.

"It will be a smaller presence than what is here now. We think it's important to maintain some presence down here just because we think Basra is an important city," Odierno said in Basra shortly after being briefed by British Maj. Gen. Andy Salmon about the area's stability. Odierno said Multi-National Division - Center, which is responsible for the area just south of Baghdad will expand down to the Persian Gulf and the Kuwaiti border. Basra is at the heart of the country's vital oil industry. Odierno said he expects the transition between U.S. and

British troops to begin at the end of March.

Under an agreement approved by the Iraqi government, the United States can keep troops in the country until the end of 2011. That agreement, which takes effect on Jan. 1, gives Iraq oversight over the nearly 150,000 American troops now in the country.

Odierno also said no decision has been made to withdraw the nearly 22,000 Marines in Iraq despite comments from the Marine commandant that there was a greater role for them in Afghanistan.

"Any decision on force structure here in Iraq will be made by me," he said, adding he would then make recommendations to Gen. David Petraeus, commander of all U.S. forces in Iraq and Afghanistan.

He said any decision would be based on being able to continue the U.S. mission and not give up any security gains.

In 2006, U.S. forces attempted to hand over security in portions of Iraq to security forces only to have them collapse under the weight of sectarian violence and insurgent attacks. Iraqi forces are now responsible for security in 13 of the 18 provinces with coalition forces available for help if requested.

There has been an 86 percent

decline in violence this year from the previous year, Iraqi Army Maj. Gen. Qassim Atta said Sunday. Attacks have dropped from 180 a day last year to about 10 a day this year. He also said murder rates had declined to below pre-war levels, about one per 100,000 people.

But U.S. officials say the security situation remains tenuous.

Chief among Odierno's concerns is providing adequate security for the Jan. 31 Iraq-wide provincial elections.

U.S. and Iraqi officials hope the elections will redress problems created by the last regional balloting in January 2005, when Sunnis largely stayed away from the polls. As a result, Kurds and Shiites won a disproportionate share of the power.

Odierno said the outcome of the election may undercut an effort by some groups to hold a referendum on whether predominantly Shiite Basra province should become a self-ruled region with the same powers as the Kurdish self-ruled area in the north. That would give local authorities more control of the province's vast oil wealth.

"I think after the provincial elections, if that goes right and the people believe they are being represented properly," he said, "we'll see if they still want to do that or not." □

US: Zimbabwe unity deal can't work with Mugabe

By **DONNA BRYSON**
Associated Press Writer

PRETORIA, South Africa (AP) - The U.S. can no longer support a proposed Zimbabwean power-sharing deal that would leave Robert Mugabe, "a man who's lost it," as president, the top U.S. envoy for Africa told reporters Sunday.

Jendayi Frazer, the U.S. assistant secretary of state for African affairs, made the announcement in South Africa after spending the last several days explaining the U.S. shift to regional leaders. The new U.S. stance will put pressure on Zimbabwe's neighbors - South Africa in particular - to abandon Mugabe. But South Africa said its position was unchanged.

The U.S., Frazer said, has become convinced Mugabe is incapable of sharing power. She cited political moves he has made since September without consulting the opposition, reports his regime has continued to harass and arrest opposition and human rights activists, and the continued deterioration of Zimbabwe's humanitarian and economic situation. Particularly worrying, she said, was the rapid spread of cholera, an easily treatable and preventable disease that has killed at least 1,000 Zimbabweans since August.

Frazer cited accusations from the Mugabe regime that the West waged biological warfare to deliberately start the cholera epidemic as an

indication Mugabe is "a man who's lost it, who's losing his mind, who's out of touch with reality."

If Mugabe's neighbors were to unite and "go to Mugabe and tell him to go, I do think he would go," she said.

Secretary State Condoleezza Rice said Sunday on the American TV program "Meet the Press" that Zimbabwe was discussed at the United Nations last week.

"This is another circumstance in which the international community, most of it - including, by the way, several African states: Botswana, the leadership of Kenya and others - are saying that the regime of Robert Mugabe has got to go," Rice said. You have a cholera epidemic there. You have a humanitarian disaster in terms of food. You have the goons of the Mugabe regime going around and detaining people and frightening people, terrorizing people. Again, the international community in that circumstance needs to act."

But South Africa said Sunday the agreement under which Mugabe would remain president and opposition leader Morgan Tsvangirai would take a new prime minister's post was the only way forward.

South Africa is the region's diplomatic leader. Its former president, Thabo Mbeki, mediated Zimbabwe's power-sharing agreement in September and has worked since then to break an impasse

between Mugabe and the Zimbabwean opposition over how to divide Cabinet posts.

When the power-sharing agreement was announced, the U.S. gave crucial support, offering to lift sanctions and help Zimbabwe re-negotiate relations with international lenders if the deal were implemented.

"We're not prepared to do any of that now," Frazer said Sunday.

Asked later whether that robbed Zimbabwe's neighbors of important leverage, Thabo Masebe, spokesman for South African President Kgalema Motlanthe, said only: "Our position has not changed."

Tendai Biti, chief negotiator for Zimbabwean opposition leader Tsvangirai, said the opposition remained



Zimbabwe President Robert Mugabe, left, and his wife Grace, right, greet delegates at Mugabe's ruling ZANU PF party's 10th annual Congress in Bindura, Zimbabwe, Friday, Dec. 19, 2008. Mugabe said Friday that 'Zimbabwe is mine' and vowed never to surrender, saying no African nation is brave enough to topple him.

Associated Press

committed to the stalled talks aimed at forming a power-sharing government with Mugabe and Tsvangirai. But Biti noted that Tsvangirai

said Friday that he will ask his party to halt the power-sharing negotiations unless political detainees are released or charged by Jan. 1. □



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Russia tariff protest widens into broad discontent



Police detains participants of a protest against the authorities' plans to raise tariffs on imported used Japanese cars in central part of the Pacific port of Vladivostok, about 4,000 miles east of Moscow, Sunday, Dec. 21, 2008. Some 500 motorists rallied in Russia's far east Saturday to protest the government's decision to raise car import tariffs, and thousands others are expected to stage similar demonstrations across Russia Sunday.

By LIYA KHABAROVA
Associated Press Writer

VLADIVOSTOK, Russia (AP) - Riot police clubbed, kicked and detained dozens in the Pacific port of

Vladivostok on Sunday in a harsh crackdown on a protest that was one of dozens across Russia by people outraged over an increase in car import tariffs.

Associated Press

With unemployment spiking, prices rising and the ruble sliding, the protests over a seemingly mundane tariff appear to be broadening into a wide expression of public discontent - and beginning to present a genuine challenge to the Kremlin.

"The Russian people have started to open their eyes to what's happening in this country," said Andrei Ivanov, a 30-year-old manager who joined about 200 people at a rally in Moscow. "The current regime is not acting on behalf of the welfare of the people, but against the welfare of the people."

The government announced the tariffs on imported automobiles earlier this month to bolster flagging domestic car production and try to head off layoffs or labor unrest among the country's more than 1.5 million car industry workers.

But imported used cars are highly popular among Russians, particularly throughout the Far East, where private cars imported from nearby Japan vastly outnumber vehicles built in Russia. Protests against the tariffs, which are scheduled to go into effect next month, have been most vehement in Russia's largest Pacific port - Vladivostok.

Hundreds rallied in the city Saturday for the second weekend in a row, and demonstrators hoped to rally again Sunday. But authorities refused to authorize the demonstration and hundreds of riot police blocked off the city square where it was planned.

Soon after, several hundred people gathered on Vladivostok's main square - not the planned site of

the demonstration. Waiting riot police ordered them to disperse, saying the gathering was illegal. The group refused and began singing and dancing around a traditional Russian New Year's tree on the square.

Police - some shipped in from Moscow, 95,750 miles to the west - began hauling men and women into waiting vans as people chanted "Fascists!" and "Shame! Shame!"

An Associated Press reporter saw police beat several people with truncheons, throw them to the ground and kick them. Several parents were detained as their children watched.

"Riot police encircled the group ... even those just passing by, and they started taking people away without any sort of comment," said Olga Nikolaevna, a 62-year-old retiree who witnessed the incident.

An AP reporter saw at least 10 journalists detained by police, who demanded that several journalists turn over videotapes and photo memory chips. Police wrecked a Japanese TV crew's video camera, and some journalists were beaten and kicked, including an AP photographer.

Vladimir Litvinov, who heads a local rights group, said police behaved "like beasts" and had no right to break up the gathering, since it wasn't overtly political.

"We support a civilized resolution to all the problems but when they send Moscow riot police to break up a gathering in our city, and they start breaking arms and legs and heads..." he told AP. "People are very, very angry. It's hard to predict what might happen now."

Regional police officials said they were forbidden from

saying how many people had been arrested. Protest organizers and witnesses counted more than 100.

Protests over the car tariffs, which take effect next month, were held in more than a dozen cities, with motorists driving in long columns with flags waving. National TV channels, which are state-controlled, ignored the demonstrations.

In Moscow, about 200 protesters wore yellow ribbons on their jackets and held placards decrying the tariffs, the government and the rise in consumer prices.

"At the same time we're registering general discontent with the policies of this government," said Yulia Marova, a 28-year-old Moscow resident.

The Kremlin has sidelined political opponents and put tight controls on civil society and the media, rolling back many post-Soviet freedoms. But in recent weeks, migrant workers in the Urals city of Yekaterinburg protested wage arrears and pensioners in the Siberian town of Barnaul took to the streets to protest the withdrawal of discounted fares on public transport.

Domestic and foreign car companies' announcements of production cutbacks in Russia and warnings of potential layoffs have added to the Kremlin worries. The industry employs more than 1.5 million workers nationwide.

While auto industry workers have applauded the tariff increase, Russian consumers and others involved in the \$30.5 billion car import business have not. Many Russians say they have a right to buy what they want without paying to support the Russian auto industry. □

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China to send 3 ships to Somalia to battle pirates



In this photo released by China's Xinhua News Agency, pirates aim weapons on the deck of the Chinese ship 'Zhenhua 4' in the Gulf of Aden, on Wednesday, Dec. 17, 2008. According to Xinhua, the ship escaped pirate hijack after the crew fought for four hours with the help of a multi-coalition force and no injuries or deaths were reported. Nine pirates armed with rocket launchers and heavy machine guns boarded the ship then the 30 crew members locked themselves in their accommodation area, using fire hydrants and firebombs to prevent the attackers from entering, said an official with China Maritime Search and Rescue Center (CMSRC).

Associated Press

BEIJING (AP) — China's navy will send three ships to the waters off Somalia this week to protect Chinese vessels and crews from pirate attacks, state media said.

Two destroyers and a supply ship will leave the island province of Hainan in southern China on Dec. 26, the official Xinhua News Agency said. They will patrol the Gulf of Aden and areas off the Somali coast, Foreign Ministry spokesman, Liu Jianchao, said in a statement issued late Saturday.

"Their major task is to protect the safety of Chinese ships and crew on board as well as ships carrying humanitarian relief material for international organizations," Liu said.

Piracy has taken an increasingly costly toll on international shipping, especially in the Gulf of Aden, one of the world's busiest sea lanes. Spurred by widespread poverty in their homeland, the pirates have made an estimated \$30 million hijacking ships for

ransom this year, seizing more than 40 vessels off Somalia's 1,880-mile (3,000-kilometer) coastline.

Earlier this week, Liu said about 20 percent of the 1,265 Chinese ships passing through the area have come under attack so far this year. Seven hijackings have involved Chinese ships or crews.

Experts say most of the commercial ships are not armed, meaning crews have

few options when attacked. A Chinese cargo ship's crew, aided by the international anti-piracy force, fought off an attempted hijacking this week using Molotov cocktails and water hoses.

China's plans to send warships is a cautious step toward more engagement.

Though Beijing has a huge global commercial maritime presence, the People's Liberation Army Navy

has primarily focused on defending China's coast and, until now, limited operations abroad to port calls, goodwill visits and exercises with other navies.

The Chinese fleet would join ships from the U.S., Denmark, Italy, Russia and other countries in patrolling the Gulf of Aden, which leads to the Suez Canal and is the quickest route from Asia to Europe and the Americas. □

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Amsterdam's gay Christmas features Mary in drag

By ARTHUR MAX

Associated Press Writer

AMSTERDAM, Netherlands (AP) - Amsterdam hosted a Christmas celebration for its gay community on Sunday featuring a nativity tableau with a male Mary in drag that church organizations denounced as an affront to traditional values. Organizers said the event was meant to raise Amsterdam's profile as a gay capital at a time when homosexuals feel threatened. Christians for Truth, an independent religious group, had asked the city council to cancel the "Pink Christmas," event, saying it made a mockery of Christian tenets. The city did not comment.

A male entertainer known as Wendy Mills posed as Mary in a blonde wig and high-heeled black boots and holding a plastic doll. Another man played Joseph in black leather trunks and a silver shawl. The five-person manger scene was staged off the street, in the courtyard of a nightclub. Visitors were invited to be photographed with the group. The first was 3-month-old Lily Pink Albers, Mills' niece. "By portraying Joseph and Mary as homosexuals, a twisted human fantasy is being added to the history of the Bible," Christians for Truth said in a statement ahead of the event. A few dozen visitors wandered through the 100-yard (meter)

long Pink Market past stalls selling leather goods and Christmas cards with gay themes on a downtown street known for its gay nightlife and popular restaurants. Frank van Dalen, chairman of Pro Gay, which organized the event, said gays were not satisfied with being tolerated, but wanted to be "socially accepted as an indivisible part of society." He said the Amsterdam city council sponsored the euro15,000 (\$21,000) event, which he hoped would become a regular event, like the annual floating summertime gay pride parade through the city's canals that attracts tens of thousands of visitors. "Our objective is not to



'Miss Wendy', center, portraying the Virgin Mary in drag, holds his three-month-old niece Lily Pink Albers, as she poses with other men at a tableau of the Nativity in the garden of Bar Arc in Amsterdam, Netherlands, Sunday Dec. 21, 2008. Amsterdam is hosting its first Pink Christmas for gays, featuring a nativity tableau with a male Mary in drag that church organizations denounced as provocative. The event is sponsored by the Amsterdam city council.

Associated Press

be offensive. This is about visibility," he said. Van Dalen pointed to a report last month that said homophobia was an ingrained problem in Amsterdam, despite the city's freewheeling reputation. The study by the University of Amsterdam reported 67

violent attacks against gays in 2007, which police said was about average. Van Dalen said gays were feeling increasingly uncomfortable in public in recent years, and that they perceived Dutch society as more assertive about "classical values."

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Thursday, December 25th

<p>e Juggling Fish At Playa Linda Beach Side At Divi Tamarijn At Aruba Beach Club</p> <p>e Lazy Lizard at Moomba Beach</p> <p>e Coconut Trading Co. At Marriott Ocean Club</p> <p>e Mill Minimarket</p> <p>H. Palm & Company at Playa Linda</p>	<p>9:00 AM - 7:00 PM 9:00 AM - 9:00 PM 9AM - 1PM & 2PM - 6PM 8:30 AM - 8:00 PM 9:00 AM - 9:00 PM 8:30 AM - 9:00 PM 9:00 AM - 10:00 PM</p>
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Friday, December 26th

<p>e Juggling Fish At Playa Linda Beach Side At Divi Tamarijn At Aruba Beach Club</p> <p>e Lazy Lizard at Moomba Beach</p> <p>e Coconut Trading Co. At Marriott Ocean Club</p> <p>e Mill Minimarket</p> <p>H. Palm & Company at Playa Linda</p>	<p>9:00 AM - 7:00 PM 9:00 AM - 9:00 PM 9AM - 1PM & 2PM - 6PM 8:30 AM - 8:00 PM 9:00 AM - 9:00 PM 8:30 AM - 9:00 PM 9:00 AM - 11:00 PM</p>
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Britain marks 20th anniversary of Lockerbie bombing

LONDON (AFP) – Britain marked the 20th anniversary of the Lockerbie bombing on Sunday, recalling the night a US-bound jet was blown up over a quiet Scottish town, killing 270 people.

More than 150 people gathered for a wreath-laying ceremony at the cemetery in Lockerbie, which saw 259 passengers and crew killed and 11 more dead on the ground just before Christmas 1988 as flaming debris crushed homes.

Lockerbie had gone through “20 years of the deepest mourning and the experience of the greatest pain,” local clergyman Canon Michael Bands said at the ceremony, one of several low-key memorial events held in the town.

Relatives of those who were killed later attended a service in the chapel at London’s Heathrow Airport, from where Pan Am Flight 103 took off on the night of December 21, 1988, mostly carrying Americans home for Christmas.

A minute’s silence was held in Lockerbie and at Heathrow just after 1900 GMT, to mark the exact time of the tragedy. In the United States, ceremonies were organised in Arlington National Cemetery in Virginia as well as Syracuse University in New York state.

A total of 35 Syracuse students coming home after studying in London and Florence, Italy, were killed on board the flight.

Barely 40 minutes into the flight to New York, the Boeing 747 was ripped apart by a bomb in the luggage hold at an altitude of 9,400 metres (31,000 feet), killing everyone

on board.

Lockerbie residents recall the explosion turning the sky orange and wreckage, fuel and bodies raining down.

The town had unwittingly been caught up in international terror.

The tortuous investigation into the bombing eventually led to the jailing for 27 years of a former Libyan intelligence officer, Abdelbaset Ali Mohmet Al-Megrahi.

He is serving his sentence in a Scottish prison and, now suffering from cancer, recently failed in an attempt to be released.

The bombing killed 180 Americans and plunged ties between Libya and the West into a chill which has only recently thawed.

Libya may have been welcomed back into the international fold, but some Lockerbie residents continue to be haunted by memories of the night the jet fell from the skies onto a town decked out in Christmas decorations.

One floral tribute left at the cemetery Sunday read: “Twenty years have passed since you all left us to become flying angels. Your souls and spirits will always be with each and everyone one of us”.

Retired police inspector George Stobbs, 74, described the scene on the day of the disaster as “the nearest thing to hell I ever want to see”.

After seeing news of the crash on television, he headed to nearby Sherwood Crescent, where the 11 Lockerbie residents perished.

“There was this great crater, a great mass of burning. The

heat was intense. I saw an iron gate melting as if someone was putting a blow torch on to butter,” he said.

Maxwell Kerr, 72, remembers finding poignant reminders of the passengers.

“It was families going home at Christmas. We did find lots of Christmas presents lying scattered about. There was men, women, children and babies. It’s horrific when you think about it,” he said.

The link to Libya was uncovered by investigators who painstakingly traced material from the Samsonite suitcase in which the explosives were planted inside a radio-cassette player.

They found that the bomb had probably been placed on board a non-Pan Am flight in Frankfurt which connected



Some of the damage caused by the explosion of the 747 Pan Am Boeing over Lockerbie in December 1988. Britain is commemorating the 20th anniversary of the Lockerbie bombing, recalling the night when a US-bound jet carrying 259 passengers and crew was blown up over a Scottish town.

(AFP/File/Letkey)

with the doomed aircraft at Heathrow.

Flight 103 was late taking off -- if it had been on schedule it would have been over the

Atlantic when the bomb detonated, sparing the town of Lockerbie and probably leaving the plane’s remains at the bottom of the ocean. □



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